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Analysis of tourism and hospitality sustainability education with co-competition creativity course planning

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ABSTRACT

Recently, with the increasing awareness of the importance of environmental protection, a critical need for tourism and hospitality education on sustainability has been widely recognized. This study adapts a pedagogical co-competition strategy, creative problem solving (CPS) and Abbreviated Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking for accurately measures creativity to predict the influences of the learning environment. Questionnaires were collected, with 196 effective anonymous responses from tourism and hospitality students. The results show that co-competition course design may encourage students' critical thinking regarding sustainability and increase student creativity, which should be promoted as a useful tool in sustainability education in the future.

1. Introduction

Since the UNESCO conference in Tbilisi formalized the early Environmental Education principles, studies on social responsibility and new ethical and political problems related to developing an understanding of impacts on the biophysical environment have gradually become more prominent (Öhman, 2016; Yeh, Ma, & Huan, 2016). In response to environmental issues, universities have initiated curricula to support the development of related sustainability knowledge and capabilities for certain students. This trend is particularly evident in tourism and hospitality education because the tourism and hospitality industry is responsible for a significant environmental impact (Styles, Schoenberger, & Galvez-Martos, 2015). Under the direction of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Ceulemans, Lozano, and Alonso-Almeida (2015) suggested that because students are future managers, politicians, academics and citizens HEIs should aim at changing student thinking and behaviour regarding sustainability while moving toward becoming “green universities” dedicated to sustainable development (Thomas, 2009). More recently, a growing recognition has emerged that sustainability knowledge involves numerous specific physical environmental components and that each such component has unique implications with respect to changing student behaviour (Westerman, Westerman, & Whitaker, 2016).

Our paper makes several contributions to the literature on creativity and sustainability education. First, sustainability education has received increased attention recently in higher education (Maragakis, van den Dobbelaar, & Maragakis, 2016; Westerman et al., 2016), combining various new materials with current sustainability assessments in the classroom to inspire students' critical thinking yet to be fully explored (Thomas, 2009). We advance creativity theory in general and the literature on student sustainability

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knowledge and improve students' creative ideas specifically by providing novel insights into the previously neglected progress of sustainability education. Further, [Quendler and Lamb \(2016\)](#) asserted that learning environment may influence development competences, skills and knowledge for sustainability. Therefore, this study explained how an appropriate course design and the learning environment may contribute to individual thinking on sustainability. Furthermore, the literature has focused on what individuals can learn ([Liburd & Christensen, 2013](#)); however, to fully understand sustainability education and its impact on individual behaviour, it is also necessary to reflect on actual learning outputs, which is the purpose of this study. That is, how individuals behave depends on what they can do and how they can learn from the sustainability knowledge presented in the classroom. By investigating the link between student creativity and sustainability knowledge and behaviour, our research introduces creative problem solving (CPS) and uses six alternative creativity enhancement tools to improve individual creative thinking. As [Mitchell and Walinga \(2017\)](#) asserted, CPS might not only increase individual creativity but also function as a key driver for sustainability. Second, co-competition comes from the concepts of "Collaboration" and "Competition", which provide learners with higher levels of interest, motivate them and increase the speed of learning significantly ([Hsiao & Rashvand, 2011](#)).

The traditional Chinese education system followed Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC), which emphasizes collaborative learning and seeks support to eliminate individualistic efforts and competition with other students ([Hou, 2015; Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009](#)). Particularly in tourism and hospitality education, collaborative learning helps students gather relevant information and avoid conflicts for problem-solving ([Fleming & Martin, 2007](#)). However, in the context of decentralization and marketization, the Chinese education system and policies also need to be modified to capture the internationalization trend and to inspire students' critical thinking ([Ngok, 2007](#)). According to [Sigala \(2002\)](#), it is this conflict and competition that enable tourism and hospitality students to experience cognitive growth, identify new perspectives, and compare opportunities; it also encourages students' thinking differences for developing problem-solving skills. [Fu et al. \(2009\)](#) asserted that courses including competition and collaborative pedagogies proved to be effective procedures for enhancing students' learning motivation in a conventional classroom. Thus, we extend the education theories to tourism and hospitality education by demonstrate that creating a co-competition learning environment may shed light on the potential interests of and conflicts among students in the classroom, encourage them to learn from one another and open their minds. Higher education should provide ways to inspire students to explore, cooperate, integrate, and synthesize in developing content knowledge and skills ([Livingston, 2010](#)). Recent studies have raised the critical issue of competition in creative production ([Gross, 2016](#)). However, to the best of our knowledge, until now, applications of co-competition in course design have been lacking, although the question of whether cooperation and competition foster or inhibit creativity has been widely addressed in business innovation discussions ([Webb, 2016](#)). This study presents a new perspective on how traditional education views the transition between identities. In addition, it helps students recognize obtrusive behaviour in competitive situations and un-obtrusive behaviour in cooperation. Third, by integrating sustainability education in the creative learning environment, our approach differs from that of the education literature, which suggests that the learning environment and sustainability knowledge converge over time. Our results support the hypothesis that providing an appropriate environment may trigger improved sustainability

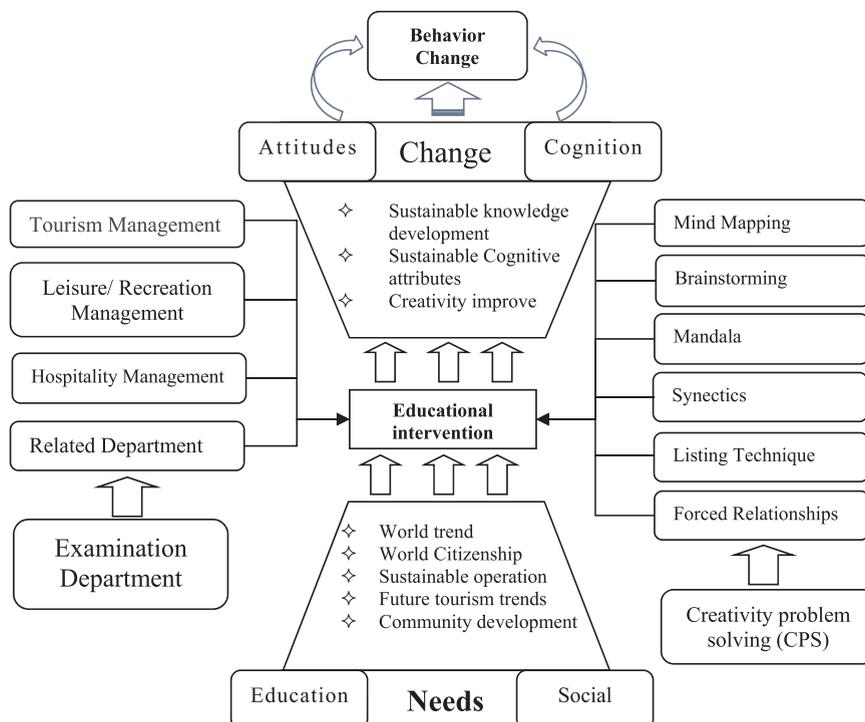


Fig. 1. Research framework.

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